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Secção Autónoma de Ciências Sociais, Jurídicas e Políticas

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GARANTIA DA QUALIDADE NA CHINA E NO REINO UNIDO: UMA ANÁLISE COMPARATIVA

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CHINA AND UK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Ensino Superior – Erasmus Mundus, realizada sob a orientação científica da Doutora Maria João Machado Pires da Rosa, Professora Auxiliar do Departamento de Economia, Gestão e Engenharia Industrial da Universidade de Aveiro.

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palavras-chave

Ensino Superior; Garantia da Qualidade; Análise Comparativa

resumo

O objectivo da presente dissertação é proceder a uma análise comparativa das políticas de garantia da qualidade do ensino superior na China e no Reino Unido. Com a emergência da economia do conhecimento, bem como com o crescimento da internacionalização e da globalização, o ensino superior tem vindo a ocupar uma posição estratégica muito importante na maioria dos países. Desde 1997 que as preocupações da sociedade com a qualidade do ensino superior se têm vindo a fazer sentir na China, sobretudo devido à significativa expansão do seu sistema de ensino superior. O governo Chinês considera como responsabilidade sua a educação, especialmente a educação superior, muito por causa da cada vez mais acérrima e global competição por pessoas com formação superior.

Para encontrar as similitudes e as diferenças entre as políticas de garantia da qualidade na China e no reino Unido recorre-se ao enquadramento conceptual proposto por Perellon's (2001). Mais especificamente, são comparadas a política chinesa de avaliação da qualidade do ensino de graduação e a política inglesa de auditorias institucionais. Depois de se analisarem os objectivos, mecanismos de controlo, áreas a abordar, procedimentos e utilização de ambas as políticas, são identificados os seus pontos de convergência e divergência.

A dissertação termina com uma discussão das implicações que a experiência do Reino Unido em termos de garantia da qualidade pode ter para a China. São propostas sugestões para melhorar a política Chinesa de avaliação da qualidade do ensino de graduação com base nos ensinamentos colhidos com a análise da política de auditoria institucional Inglesa.

keywords Higher Education; Quality Assurance; Comparative Analysis

abstract

The focus of the thesis is the comparison of the quality assurance policies in China and UK's higher education systems. With the emergence of the knowledge economy, internationalization and globalization, higher education is put into a strategic level in most of the countries in the world. Since 1997 when the great expansion of China's higher education system took place, that the quality issues are raised to a societal concern. The Chinese government considers the education as its own responsibility, especially the higher education, because of the fierce competition for the talented people around the globe.

This thesis employs Perellon's (2001) comparative framework to compare the similarities and differences of the China and UK's quality assurance policies. More specifically, the Chinese quality assessment policy of undergraduate degree programmes and institutional audit policy of the English higher education system are compared. After analyzing both policies' objectives, control mechanism, areas to address, procedures and uses, the convergences and divergences of the policies of the policies constitute the thesis main findings.

This thesis concludes with a discussion around what China can learn from the UK's higher education quality assurance policy, because China's quality assurance policy is still on its initial stages while the UK has a significant experience. Suggestions will be given on how to improve the Chinese undergraduate quality assessment policy by comparing it with the England's institutional audit policy.

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Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDGDC	China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HEEC	Higher Education Evaluation Centre of the Chinese Ministry of Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
MoE	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
PISA	the Program for International Student Evaluation
TIMSS	the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
IALS	the International Adult Literacy Survey

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

The importance of education in the coming years is recognized as a necessary ingredient for sustainable economic growth. Education is seen as the key to a better quality of life, as well as a means of providing a new set of skills required for the future years. With the development of the global economy, one major transition of society is the move from an industrialized society to a knowledge society. The emerging knowledge economy has propelled higher education to the centre stage of political agendas, which led the World Bank to pronounce in 2002 that "Knowledge has become the most important factor in economic development" (WorldBank, 2002). Success in the knowledge society depends, to a large extent, on the capability of productivity and innovation of human capital. Also in China concerns with the development of a knowledge society are reality, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) paying attention on the need to innovate and make the country competitive in the new global market. This has pushed higher education (HE) into a new role and position, as a strategic instrument to the development of a knowledge society.

Sooner or later, every nation will face the need for mass higher education (Lingenfelter, 2006). With the unprecedented speed of expansion and massification, strengthening quality has become the first priority for Chinese government and quality evaluations now stand as the new meta-discourse of higher education (Barnett, 1994). The Ministry of Education's *2003-2007 Action Plan for Revitalizing Education* states that:

> "Education represents the basis of fundamental long-term development. In order to fully realize the building of a prosperous society and the great task of revitalizing the Chinese nation, it is necessary to persevere in implementing the strategy of developing the country through science and education and strengthening the nation through the cultivation of talent" (MoE, 2002)

In 2001, China eventually became one of 144 formal members of WTO. Education service, including HE service, is now included in the - General Agreement on Trade in Services. Higher education as a policy domain is no longer just a nation-state issue. There are no restrictions on consumption abroad any more. Now China is the biggest student exporter in the world, which is causing a serious brain drain problem in China (see Figure 1).

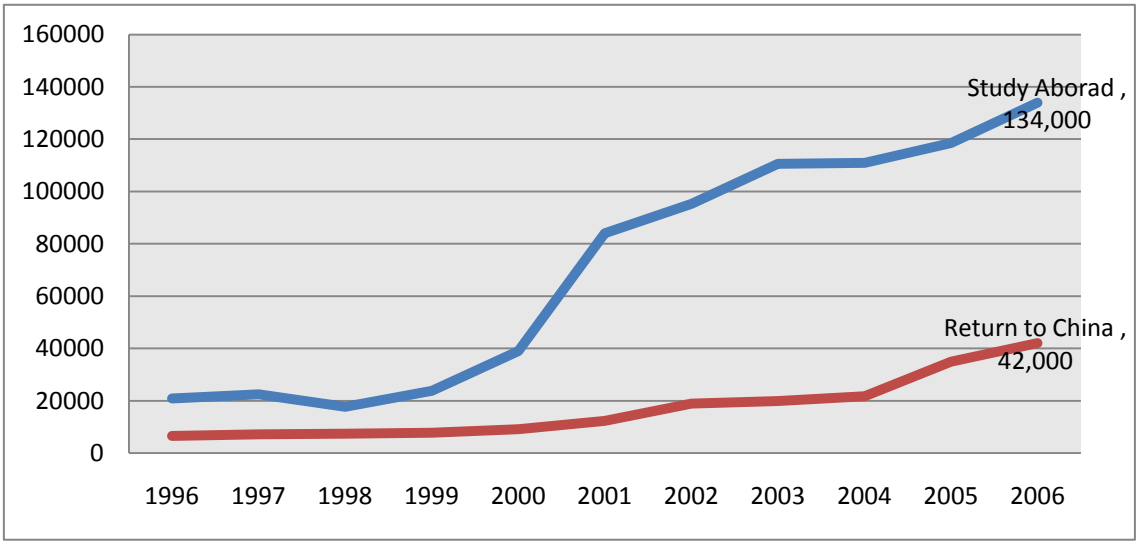

Figure 1: The brain drain phenomenon in China (Source: China Statistics Bureau)

In the turn of 21st century, China appeared as the main source country and emerging major host country (Guruz, 2008). It is of vital importance for Chinese higher education to share with the well-developed countries the same standard; so, a growing awareness of the importance of quality in higher education has developed in China in the last 10 years. The quality of UK's higher education has a strong reputation and a long standing history in the world. Compared with the UK's higher education quality assurance system, the Chinese one is just on an initial stage; therefore, it certainly is – relevant and helpful for China to study the UK's experience, learning from it. It seems that it is meaningful to compare the two countries' higher education quality assurance policies in order to contribute to the improvement of the Chinese one.

1.2 Motivation

The motivation to choose the topic of comparing the Chinese and UK HE quality assurance policies lies first of all in the researcher's interests. I got my first Master's degree in UK and I am interested in the way UK attracts so many international students from all over the world, including a significant number of Chinese students. Besides the language issue, would it also be possible to consider UK's higher education quality as playing a role in the country's attractiveness of Chinese students? Additionally, I am a lecturer in Qingdao University, China, where I participated in different quality assessment mechanisms implementation in the last four years, such as subject-based assessments and undergraduate assessment processes.

In a recent statement, the UK Higher Education Minister noted that

> 'Education is at the heart of the UK's developing relationship with China. UK and China have made great progress in strengthening the educational links, and links between UK and Chinese universities are thriving'. (QAA, 2006a, p. 7)

In recognition of this and in line with the UK's government international strategy for education (2005), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) decided that the 2006 audit of overseas partnership links should focus on China. There is then an additional motivation to make a comparative analysis of China and UK higher education quality assurance policies.

1.3 Aims and research objectives

The aim of this master thesis is to compare China and UK quality assurance policies, employing Perellon's comparative framework. The research objectives are as follows:

1. to analyse UK's quality assurance policy;
2. to analyse China's quality assurance policy;

3. to make a comparative analysis of UK and China quality assurance policies to find convergence and divergence.

1.4 Methodology

Social science comparative methods will be employed to interpret China and UK quality assurance policies. Each country has a complicated and unique configuration of events and structure. By analyzing their quality assurance policies, using Perellon's theoretical framework (2001) convergence and divergence among the two policies will be identified.

The Chinese quality assurance policy is a quite new phenomenon compared with the European and US quality assurance policies. Despite the differences in the size of the higher education systems, geographic location of the two countries, and development stage of the quality assurance policies, there are enough common attributes to allow the proposed comparison analysis:

1. UK, as one of the Anglo-Saxon countries, and China, with a long standing history;
2. In China and England, the quality has become an issue worth setting up a particular policy;
3. The two countries consider that higher education has a strategic importance in the development of the economy;
4. The implementation of the quality assurance policies is made through governmental agencies.

1.4.1 Research approach - Comparative methods

Research into comparative higher education policy is well established (Tight, 2003). According to Tight (2003), the comparative methods can be categorized in different ways.

- Comparisons between just two or three countries, particularly if they are adjacent or share common histories and languages, can be relatively straightforward to undertake, even for a single researcher.

- Comparisons between several countries in one region of the world are somewhat more complex, though this way, again, be kept within reasonable bounds if the countries considered have cultural or economic factors in common.

- Global, or neo-global, comparative studies offer the greatest challenges of all, of course, though these may be kept under control by forcing the study on either developed or developing countries.

The author will employ the first way, the comparison between two countries, to compare the China's and UK's quality assurance policies. Although the comparative analysis method is been well developed, there are some disadvantages and limitations when one reports to it. According to Goedegebuure & van Vught (1994) there are three common problems related to the comparative research design. First, there is the 'problem of equivalence', that is the perception that the phenomena being compared are similar or signify something equal. A second problem related to 'the number of macro social cases' that are empirically relevant and can be compared. Coupled with the issue of the number of cases is the third problem, the fact that macro social units are 'significant variance reducers'. This infers that "the variance within these units is less than among them" (ibid, 1994). However, even those macrosocial units that are "radically different, can be compared" (Teune, 1990, p49).

1.4.2 Definition of policy

The policy concept can have different meanings and definitions. According to Easton (1953), policy is "the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society". He

complements this definition with a model - Systems Analysis of Political Life - where policy is the political system's response to environmental inputs of demands and support. Dye (1987) defines policy from a behavioural perspective, claiming that it is "whatever governments choose to do or not to do". A third definition of policy is more comprehensive, and does not limit the scope of the concept to governmental behaviour: in this case a policy can be understood as a particular object or goal; a desired course of events; a selected line of action; a declaration of intent; and an implementation of intent (Ranney, 1968).

This last definition implicitly characterizes policy as a purposeful action. In contrast, the concept of policy has also been used to describe a specific plan or program. Laswell & Kaplan (1970) define the term as "a projected program of goals, values, and practices" (1970, p71). In this study an analysis will be made of the – policy process that led to the establishment of UK and China quality assurance systems. In analyzing the conception of these systems, links with previous policies that took form in directives, regulations, or even community action may be disentangled.

In this thesis, the notion of policy is then understood as the proposals formulated by governmental authorities as a course of action in a particular domain (Perellon, 2007). Perellon (2007) believes that a policy is a combination of two different and interconnected dimensions. One is the ideational dimension and the other is the material dimension. The ideational dimension is based on normative beliefs about how a policy domain should be organized. The material dimension is composed of the policy instruments translating ideas and beliefs into action. The ideational and material dimension permit the assessment of cross-national policy convergence.

1.4.3 Policy Analysis

As a field of knowledge, policy analysis is composed of a wide range of disciplines,

models and theories (Wildawsky 1979:15). In comparative studies, policy analysis can be considered as a "field of study concerned with variations in the products of governmental activity over time and across different jurisdictions." (Perellon, 2001, p156).

1.4.4 A Theoretical Framework to Analyze Quality Assurance in Higher Education

A framework is mostly a visual catalogue of the roles to be studied (policymakers, linkers, adopters), and, within each role, where these people work and what they do (context, characteristics, behaviour) (Miles and Huberman 1984). In fact, it 'frames' the research questions, providing guidance and motivation for their focus and formulation. Secondly, it provides tools that help us to interpret and analyze the data and information collected. In this thesis we will resort to a theoretical framework proposed by Perellon (2001) to compare higher education quality assurance policies in different policy paradigms and national contexts. Specifically we will use it to make a comparative analysis of the China and the UK quality assurance policies, including policy objectives, control, areas, procedures and users. This framework provides one tool to understand cross-national convergence in quality assurance policy.

Perellon's paradigm framework sets up the basis of a conceptual framework for the comparative study of quality assurance in higher education. It approaches quality assurance as a policy domain and looks into the policies that are formulated and implemented therein (Perellon, 2007). Perellon (2007) considers quality assurance as a policy that is covered in the domain of higher education. He argues that a public policy encompasses two different but complementary dimensions: an ideational one, based on normative beliefs about how a policy domain should be organized, and a material one composed of the instruments translating ideas and beliefs into action (Perellon, 2007). In this domain there are five elements as the comparative structure to analyze the convergence and divergence in two different countries, that is, the policy *objectives, control, areas, procedures and users.* These

five dimensions will be illustrated by constructing a pair of oppositions that the actors involved in higher education have to choose from.

1) Objectives: What should be the Objectives of the Quality Assurance Policy?

The objectives of a quality assurance policy should reflect the beliefs about the organization. Attention will mainly be paid to the objectives officially stated and publicly announced for a quality assurance policy. I will analyze the objectives formulated based on the official legislation and on documents which address the role of quality assurance in both higher education systems (China and UK). The objectives stated for the quality assurance policy can be presented as being of two different kinds: summative and formative. Summative objectives stress the importance of linking the results obtained through the procedures to some particular consequences. The formative objectives argue that no matter the type of procedures that are introduced, these should by no means influence the amount of funds institutions receive.

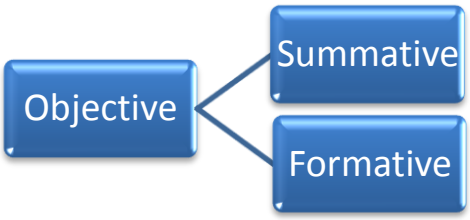

Figure 2- Two kinds of objectives for a quality assurance policy (Source: Perellon, 2007)

2) Control: Who should be Responsible for Quality Assurance?

Control here relates to the bodies that should be responsible for the implementation of the policy and the extent to which this responsibility should be controlled. In theory, one could find a situation where either the political authorities or the HE institutions are solely responsible for the development and implementation of the policy (Perellon, 2001). However, this is unlikely to be found in practical cases. Usually we will find a combination of the two possibilities. And in each one of them, we still have different scenarios: we can see if the central government or the regional government will have the responsibility of

implementing the policy; the umbrella agency or the individual institutional play the dominant role in the process of implementing the policy. Attention also has to be paid to the autonomy enjoyed by those responsible for the procedures of quality assurance. In effect, the independence of the agencies responsible for quality assurance is generally seen as a supplementary security for the validity of the entire process.

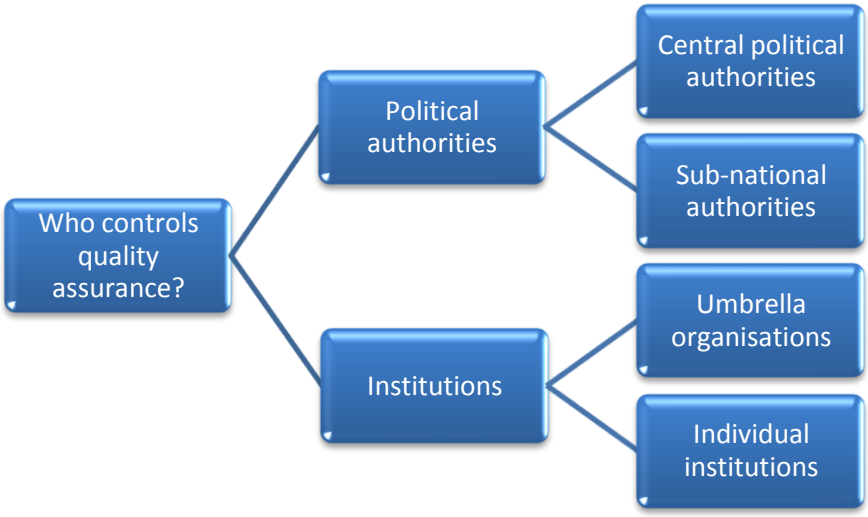

Figure 3 - The responsibility for quality assurance – who is in control. (Source: Perellon, 2007)

3) Areas: What are the Areas Covered by the Quality Assurance Procedures?

Three areas should be covered in a quality assurance policy - teaching and learning, research and administrative management. The first two are the traditional functions of HE institutions. The third encompasses the broader activities of these institutions such as the proper use of financial subsidies or the type of institutional government. In this thesis, the author will give more attention to the teaching and learning perspective with relation to the quality assurance policy.

4) Procedures: How are the Quality Assurance Procedures Set Up?

Procedures are the process of transforming and translating the policy into practice (Perellon, 2001). This process can be looked into at two different levels. The first refers to methodological questions, which have to be addressed in three different ways, the approaches, the stages and the methods; the second is the degree of involvement requested from the institutions.

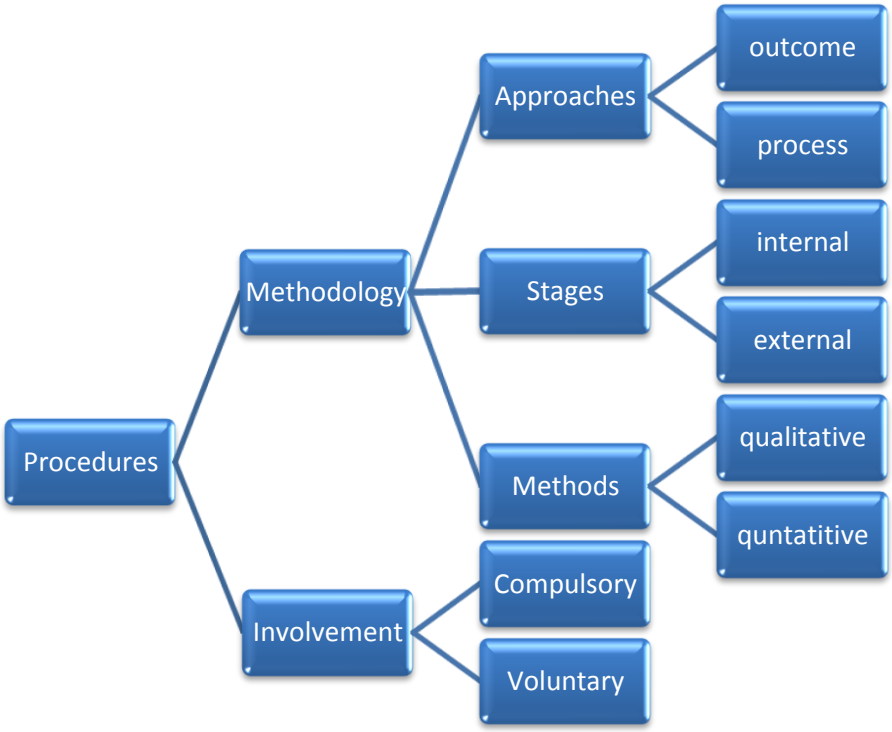

Figure 4 - Types of quality assurance procedures (Source: Perellon, 2007)

The first opposition in Figure 4 is outcome and process. It means the policy is outcome-oriented or process-oriented. The second opposition is internal vs. external procedure, which pay more attention on the different stages of the policy and who will involve in the stages. For example, the internal procedure rely more on self-assessment and self-report, while the external procedure is more on peer reviews.

The third pair of oppositions, the quantitative and qualitative approach, means the widely used assessment approach in HE, which is the performance indicators and the peer review. The last pair of opposition is how active the HEIs take part in the assessment procedure, whether they are compulsory or voluntary.

5) Uses: How is the Information Collected Used?

The fifth element to compare is how to use the information collected from the process of quality assurance. The use would reflect previous decisions regarding the objectives and the control of the system (Perellon, 2001). It would also reflect broader policy orientations.

Usually the results are publicly published as a feedback for the higher education institutions and as useful information for the societies and the public. At the same time, the league tables and rankings based on the quality assessment results may be constructed and published. From this way, the students, parents and the employers are easy to get useful information to make a 'wiser' choice regarding where to study and invest their money. Sometimes the results also relate to the funding issues, for instance, the amount of funds institutions receive from political authorities or from the management of the institutions.

1.4.5 Information Sources

The theoretical framework frames the thesis and the appropriate use and analysis of data make the effectiveness of the research. All findings will be verified on the basis of secondary data collection. This form has been characterized as a form of research where the data is collected by someone other than the researcher in question (Bryman, 2004). Additionally official documents will used to support and help data analysis. Documentary analysis is a research method used to analyze different sorts of documents. This is cost-efficient method since researchers do not have to spend time collecting primary data that then needs to be analyzed. In addition, the documents are 'non-reactive' since they already exist and there is less risk that the author might influence them. The disadvantage with this method is the fact that data is taken out of its original context, and that the researcher can extract the parts of data that best supports his/her interpretation of the data. There can also be errors in the original documents. The researchers' capability of understanding the original documents is a big issue as well. To sum up, in this work one will resort to three main sources of data:

1. Formal official documents: the documents are from the Ministries of Education, the Bureaus of Statistics of both countries, and the QAA and HEEC publishing documents
2. Official legislation
3. Official website of the ministries, UNESCO and the World Bank
4. Academic journals, literature and books

1.4.6 Limitations

The limitations of this thesis lie in several factors. First, a better understanding of the policy context, which in the case of this work is the Chinese and UK's national higher education systems, requires that it be implicitly grounded in the researcher's knowledge and experience (Tight, 2003). Although the author has studied in the UK and works in a Chinese higher education institutions, her knowledge about these two complicate and big-size higher education systems is rather limited.

Other main relevant limitation is the breadth of the data sources used in this research work. These are limited to the form of written texts. This would have been overcome if the author had resorted to interviews with senior governmental officials and policy makers in the two countries. But for practical reasons, interviews have not been an option. As Blaikie (2000) notes, the decisions about data sources are influence by the practicality of accessing those sources.

Because of the tight time for finishing the thesis and due to personal research capacities, the author could not give the deepest and thorough analysis to the two policies. In terms of the data, because the publishing of statistical data is quite a recent phenomenon in China, the statistics are not consistent every year, and the data base has not been developed enough to allow highly accurate research work, the Chinese assurance system has just finished its first round of implementation and, therefore, the reform is still going on.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

Chapter one presents an overview of the objectives of the research, the research design and methodology, so that the reader can get an immediate general idea of why and how the research was conducted.

Chapter two introduces the contexts for the concerns of the quality assurance of higher education and elaborates the literature review related to quality assurance in higher education, systematizing the concepts of quality and quality assurance.

Chapter three presents this research - context, introducing the history and development of the Chinese and UK higher education system, including the quality assurance policies and mechanisms in place in both countries. This allows a better insight into the historical and political contexts of the two policies under analysis and a better understanding of the use of the theoretical framework to analyse each individual policy.

Chapter four is the core part of the thesis; the comparative analysis of the Chinese and UK quality assurance policies is undertaken Perellon's paradigm approach is used as the analysis framework. Similarities and differences of the two policies are identified.

Chapter five concludes this thesis through a discussion of its main findings. Additionally some ideas on how quality assurance policy can be changed in the process of moving from elite to mass higher education system will be present, based on the UK's experience, being put forward some suggestions for the future reform of the Chinese quality assurance policy.

Chapter Two: Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The changing environment of the HE led to rising concerns on the importance of quality assurance in HE in the world, such as the massfication of HE around the world, the changing role of the state, the emerging of market forces, development of the knowledge economy, and the internationalization and globalization trends. The first part of this chapter is about the background of quality assurance policy. The second part consists in a general introduction to quality assurance in HE, including its purposes, approaches and the general models.

2.1 Introduction

Four elements are summarized that led to the emergence of the quality concerns and quality assurance mechanisms in higher education, that is, the massification, the changing role of the state, the market forces and the processes of internationalization and globalization. These four elements are obviously interconnected with each other and have occurred in most of the countries in the world.

2.1.1 The massification of higher education

According to Perkin (1991), in the year 1860, gross enrollment ratio (GER) in higher education was only 0.46% in Europe, and 1.1% in the US. Although, enrollment ratios were still quite low in 1930 (1.9% in Britain, 2.6% in Germany, and 4.3% in Russia), this year can nevertheless be seen as the beginning of the massification of higher education, especially because, gross enrollment ratio had increased from 3.1% to15.0% in the US (Jarausch 1983; see also Ringer 2004). By the year 1930, HE had already been massified in the US, while it was still elitist in Europe. In 1955, gross enrollment ratio averaged only 4.5% in Western Europe, and it increased to 10.3% in 1965, 19.5% in 1975, and 24.3% in

1985. The corresponding values averaged for the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand taken together were 12.5%, 24.3%, 36.6%, and 46.8%, respectively (Ramirez and Riddle 1991). Thus, higher education in Western Europe was massified in the late 1960s and early 1970s, about three decades after the US. The explosive growth in student numbers worldwide occurred after World War II. However, universities met only part of the increasing demand (Guruz, 2008). In China the great expansion of the student numbers is from 1997 and the current participate rate in HE is 23% (data for 2010).

2.1.2 Relationship between State and the Higher Education Institutions

Neave and van Vaught (1994) have described the changing relationship between the state and the higher education institutions. This relationship has changed from a model of state control to a state supervision model. It means that the state started to control HEIs from a distance, giving more autonomy to HEIs.

2.1.3 Market Forces

Higher education entered an era where in many countries policies have been developed to transform it from a public sector structured principally by government regulation into a semi-public sector responsive to demand and competition in what Niklasson (1996) refers to as a "*quasi-market*". This process is continuing at the present (see figure 5).

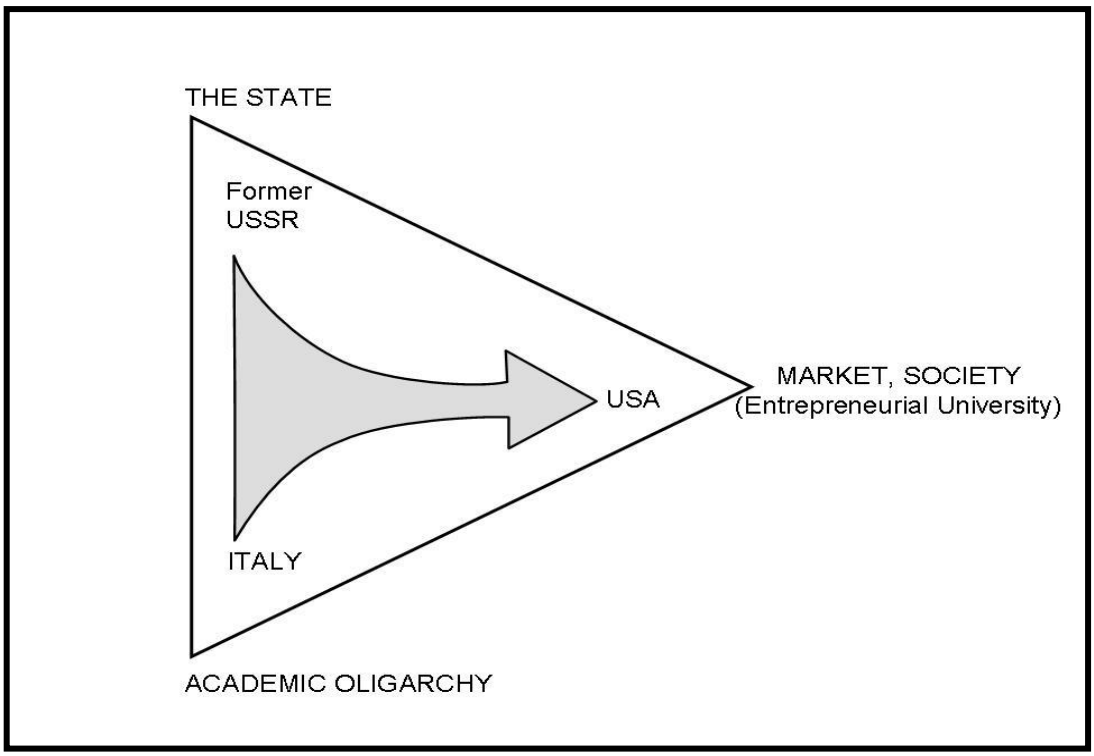

Figure 5: The Depiction of the Rise of Market Force in Clark's Triangle of Coordination (Source: Clark 1983, 143)

2.1.4 The emergence of the knowledge society & usage of ICT

One major transition of society was the move from an industrialized to a knowledge society. ICT is employed in every corner of the society. Competitiveness is increasingly based on innovation in products, productivity and up skilling in high level human capital. Innovation and higher education are now more important for economic growth. Economic studies of growth have found that innovation and productivity increased due to education, and better ways of producing things account for a greater share of economic growth than increases in simple capital and labor inputs in production (Dahlman, 2007). HEIs, because they are 'creators' of new technologies and due to their dynamic leadership in the creation and development of new products and industries, have suddenly become a sector of strategic political significance. Therefore, independently from the perspective one takes, economic or political, a quality assurance policy is seen as important to improve a nation's

human capital and the national competitiveness in the world.

2.1.5 Internationalization & Globalization

Globalization is the flow of technology, knowledge, people, values, ideas, capitcal, goods, and services across national borders, and affects each country in a different way due to a nation's individual history, traditions, culture, and priorities (Knight, 2004). According to Scott (1998), the increase in the international flow of students and academic staff, the collaboration between universities in different countries, and the flow of ideas influence the massification, governance, and structure of HE. Internationalization and globalization increase the competition for attracting more talented human capital in the world.

The Bologna process has influenced the HEIs in European Union countries. In UK, the QAA has developed and verified that the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was compatible with the qualifications framework set up through the Bologna Process (2010), the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA).

2.2 The Quality Concept in Higher Education

Quality has become one the most popular words since the 20th century. But what is quality? It is difficult to give a one-dimensional definition of the concept once that it was formed at different historical periods, being specific and historically bound rather than universal. Some authors argue that it is as old as the medieval ages (Rosa & Amaral, 2007).

There are different various ways to define quality, depending on the national contexts and for the different stakeholders. In higher education, many types of stakeholders can be identified: students, teachers, employers, qualified professional groups, consumers or

citizens concerned by the action of trained professionals, donators, etc. Their needs and their quality conception of higher education most of the times do not overlap and sometimes even be contradictory.

Cheng's definition of education quality is "the character of the set of elements in the input, process, and output of the education system that provides services that completely satisfy both internal and external strategic constituencies by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations" (Cheng and Tam, 1997, p. 23). Chauvigné (2007) considers 'quality' as a social construct, based on the idea that quality is ''the totality of characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs".

In relation to the development of the society, the concept of higher education quality is open to development and change. Because of the massification worldwide, more stakeholders are involved in the process of quality assurance. According to Harvey and Green, stakeholders' view on quality can be categorized according to five broad definitions: *quality as exceptional, quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money and quality as transformation* (Stensaker, 2007).

- ✧ A traditional concept linked to the idea of 'excellence', usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed (Harvey, 2007).
- ✧ Focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality in this sense is summed up by the interrelated ideas of zero defects and getting things right first time.

- ✧ Quality as 'transformation' means to develop the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth (the Founding Document, 2001).

Quality as Exceptional

This definition entails the traditional concept of quality, linked to the idea of 'excellence', usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed (Harvey, 2007).

Quality as Perfection

Under this definition quality focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality in this sense is summed up by the interrelated ideas of zero defects and getting things right first time.

Quality as 'Transformation'

In this case quality means to develop the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth.

Quality as Fitness for/of Purpose

Quality is defined as fitness for purpose of a product or service. Fitness for purpose equates quality with the fulfillment of specifications or stated outcomes. Usually, the objectives are set externally and fitness for purpose becomes compliance. For others, the notion of fitness *of* purpose has been introduced to evaluate whether the quality-related intentions of an organization are adequate. Where fitness for purpose opens up the possibility of inclusive quality, as every product and service has the potential to fit its purpose and thus be a quality product or service; fitness of purpose closes down inclusivity, as there are external determinants of what is acceptable as a quality criterion (Harvey, 2007). Broadly, fitness for purpose offers two alternative priorities for specifying purpose. The first is concerned with meeting customer specifications. In the other, higher education adopts a mission-based fitness for purpose which links specification to institutional mission.

In theory, this is done by the institution demonstrating it fits either externally-prescribed

standards (such as those specified by a regulatory or professional body) or its own objectives, as specified, for example, in its values and mission statement. Fitness for purpose of academic standards is also judged, indirectly, through accreditation schemes, which again assure minimum compliance to externally-imposed standards, such as those prescribed by a professional body. In all of this, there is no direct attempt to fit student requirements; students as customer are presumed to be well served by the mediators of fitness of purpose, viz. professional bodies, quality assurance agencies or government departments.

Fitness-for-purpose-based quality assurance approaches are designed to evaluate institutional mission fulfillment but despite the intention, all quality assurance systems have an overlay of generic requirements. In short, the institution or programme is not solely judged on its ability to fulfill its mission but on whether it complies with national, governmental, disciplinary, and professional or other (threshold) expectations.

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Governments have tended to favour external quality monitoring (Green, 1994; Saito, 2002) i.e. accreditation, quality audits, and the use of performance indicators. The objective of this approach is the achievement of stated institutional goals and the conformity to given specifications, e.g. academic achievement, attendance rate, dropout rate, that is procedures of standardization and quantification (Perellon, 2001). The preconditions for this approach are that goals and specifications have been prescribed and they become standards to be achieved.

Traditional education normally defines quality in terms of inputs (e.g., physical facilities, laboratories, number of computer units, library, etc.) and processes (e.g., teaching methods, admission of students, contact hours, testing, etc.). Progressive educational systems, on the other hand, try to incorporate outputs in their definitions of quality.

Value for money

Value for money is another definition of quality:

> Quality as *value for money* sees quality in terms of return on investment. If the same outcome can be achieved at a lower cost, or a better outcome can be achieved at the same cost, then the 'customer' has a quality product or service. The growing tendency for governments to require accountability from higher education reflects a value-for-money approach. Increasingly students require value-for-money for the increasing cost to them of higher education (Harvey & Green, 1993, p4)

2.3 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance can be considered as one of the most prominent reform issues in higher education worldwide (Serrano-Velarde, 2008). At the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action, "Quality Assurance, accreditation, and the recognition of qualifications were identified as fundamental concerns for higher education" (López-Segrera, 2007, p3). For most countries of the globe, the "profession" of quality assurance in higher education has emerged since the early 1990's (Lenn, 2007). Quality assurance in higher education is developing in a context in which strongly interacting multiple developments are taking place: globalisation of production and trade, technological mutations, new forms of social and political regulation, stronger autonomy of individuals and organizations (Westlund, 2007).

The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) in UK defines quality assurance as: the set of planned and systematic activities that provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality. (HEQC, 1994). To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), quality assurance is the systematic review of educational programs to ensure that acceptable standards of education,

scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained (http://www.educatejournal.org/, 2010).

2.3.1 The Contexts for the Rising of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The National Contexts

The massification of higher education occurred in most of the countries of the world. Different stakeholders have been involved in the development of higher education institutions. Diversified higher education institutions appeared. Nevertheless diversity in higher education in no way ratifies the existing low quality in some higher education institutions, nor does it simply justify the presently unevenness in higher education quality, or encourage all the institutions to establish their own quality criteria randomly. Rather, diversity means that institutions with different mission and scale should have different criteria and evaluate quality from different perspectives (Chen, 2003). Diversity in higher education quality and quality criteria are relative to the demand of the whole society and to the quality of the whole higher education system, but institutions of the same type at the same level, or of different type but at the same level should share quality criteria that are basically identical (Dawen, 2002).

Additionally the requirements for efficiency and accountability should not be disregarded. According to Trow (1996), accountability is the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used, and to what effect. Accountability sustains the quality of performance of HEIs by forcing them to examine their own operations critically. There is a trend that universities are losing the trust they once had from the society. There seems to be emerging a trust crisis between the HEIs and the society. The public needs quality assurance systems to monitor HEIs' management, and the governments need to monitor how HEIs have used the funds they provide.

At the national level, in the beginning of 1990s, most EU countries initiated the

establishment of national quality assurance systems. It was a great event once that it transformed quality assurance into a product in higher education (Stensaker, 2007). At the same time, the relationship between the institutions and the government is gradually changed, from state control to state supervision.

The International Context

In rise of internationalization and globalization also led to, large-scale international evaluations in the 1990s, such as the Program for International Student Evaluation (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS).

In the European area the Bologna process has brought a new dimension to quality assurance. "Quality assurance is arguable the key issue for Bologna and progress in this area will largely determine the success or otherwise of the Bologna Process" (House of Commons, 2007: P38). The Bologna Process aims to replace the maze of academic degrees in Europe with a system of "comparable" degrees across the "European Area of Higher Education" (EAHE). The new common system that is emerging is based on two cycles comprising bachelor's- and master's- levels and a common credit system, similar to the degree structure and course credits in Anglo-Saxon countries.

The process of transforming the degree system has added momentum to external evaluation, assessment and quality assurance in Continental Europe. Quality assurance was given a further boost in the Ministerial Meeting in Berlin in 2003. The Communiqué of the meeting underlined, the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies in quality assurance. It was agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include: a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved; evaluation of programs or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results; a system of accreditation,

certification or comparable procedures; and international participation, cooperation and networking (Perellon, 2001).

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is a participating member of the Bologna Process. In the ministerial meeting in Bergen in 2005, the "*European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Higher Education*" was adopted, and a commitment was made to establish "*National Qualifications Frameworks*" (House of Commons, 2007). These are intended to provide commonly understood reference levels on how to describe learning, from basic skills up to the doctorate level, with an ECTS-like credit range attached to each level. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area," prepared and proposed by ENQA, were then adopted. The principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review was confirmed and created.

2.3.2 The Purposes of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Four purposes (Harvey and Newton, 2005) have been identified for external quality assurance in the higher education s: accountability, control, compliance and improvement.

Accountability

Accountability is about institutions taking responsibility for the service they provide and the public money they spend. Accountability has been the underlying reasons for introducing quality assurance mechanisms. Public accountability is inherent in the functions of public offices tasked with the responsibility of overseeing quality education. Accountability for public money is a central aspect of quality assurance processes. Methods to ensure this revolve significantly, although not exclusively, around standards checking, through the use of performance indicators on issues such as retention and completion, graduate employment statistics and research assessment exercises, often linked

to financial constraints or rewards and clearly highlighting value for money of the service provided and the academic and competence levels achieved.

The value for money notion of quality is related with the accountability of HEIs as well. There is an underlying relationship: cutbacks and efficiency savings can reduce costs (Perellon, 2007). For the academics this may be seen to result in poorer quality and thus outcomes. For the politicians, this results in the same outcomes and only the 'slack' in the system is removed (Perellon, 2007). Higher education in most countries has to demonstrate its worth and to account for its use of public resources in the face of competition for state funds. Accountability is compatible with the value-for-money definition of quality.

A second aspect of accountability has to do with the students. They must be assured that the programme of study is organized and run properly, and that an appropriate educational experience is both promised and delivered. This accountability notion is consistent, when the focus is on service delivery, with a fitness-for-purpose definition of quality or, when linked to inputs or to an excellence definition. When the focus is on the learning process, then it comes closer to a transformation definition of quality.

A third accountability aspect of quality evaluation procedures is the generation of public information that funders can use to aid funding allocation decisions and prospective students and graduate recruiters can use to inform choice. This accountability concern is commensurate with the excellence definition of quality when choice is based on hierarchical analysis and with the fitness-for-purpose one, when it is based on appropriateness for a specific end; it can also be linked to a transformation definition of quality when based on suitability of delivery and the learning environment.

Control

Control has to do with the purpose of ensuring the integrity of the higher education sector,

in particular making it difficult for poor or rogue providers to continue operating and making access to the sector dependent on the fulfilment of criteria of adequacy. In many countries, especially those with a significant private sector, governments seek to control unrestrained growth in higher education in an increasingly unrestricted market (Harvey, 2002; Rosa and Amaral, 2005). They may do this via financial controls or ministerial decree but increasingly quality monitoring and accreditation are being used to restrict market-led expansion.

The control purpose of quality assurance specifically addresses the comparability of standards: that is the standard or level of student academic or professional achievement, nationally and internationally. Attempts have been made to 'benchmark' academic standards, including externally-set and marked examinations; specification of the content of syllabuses; (threshold) descriptors of outcomes; and external examiners to ensure interinstitutional comparability of awards. The use of external examiners, for example, is well established in some countries (as example is the UK) as a means of making comparisons between programmes within subject disciplines.

Compliance

Compliance is about ensuring that institutions adopt procedures, practices and policies that are considered by funders and governments to be desirable for the proper conduct of the sector and for ensuring its quality. Government expectations include various forms of compliance that go beyond financial accountability and include the achievement of policy objectives. Governments place increasing emphasis on securing specified outputs and outcomes from publicly-funded activities in response to community expectations about improving service quality and policy effectiveness (PA Consulting, 2000). There are other stakeholders who seek compliance through quality monitoring, notably professional or regulatory bodies who may use quality monitoring to check that their preferences or policies are being acknowledged or implemented. At its simplest level, quality monitoring

has encouraged, or even forced, compliance in the production of information, be it statistical data, prospectuses, or course documents. In addition, there is pressure to ensure comparability of provision and procedures, within and between institutions, including international comparisons.

Regarding the compliance purpose another aim of quality assurance is to ensure that professional standards are maintained. This, in effect, involves compliance with professional bodies' (or other organisation's) requirements or norms, usually relating to the competence of graduates. A preferred mode of checking this is accreditation, usually with a focus on inputs, such as facilities, curricula and staffing, sometimes supported by a history of appropriate outputs. Again, this is underpinned by a positivist epistemology, an explicit view that complying with requirements will result in competent graduates, a process that can be checked through measurable, observable variables.

Improvement

The improvement purpose, sometimes also referred to as enhancement, is less about constraint and more about the encouragement of adjustment and change. Most systems of external review claim to encourage improvement; however it has been a secondary feature of most systems, especially at their initial stages. As systems move into second or third phases, the improvement element has been given more attention.

The improvement function of quality assurance procedures is normally about encouraging institutions to reflect upon their practices, with a view to enabling a process of continuous improvement of the learning process and the range of outcomes.

2.3.3 Approaches of Quality Assurance

There are basically two approaches to quality assurance in higher education: the summative and the formative one. The summative approach stresses the importance of linking the

results obtained through the procedures to some particular consequences, like funding. It is evaluative. The formative approach refers as educative assessment. It is diagnostic. In the field of HE this has taken the shape of subordinating the amount of funds delivered to the universities to how they are able to perform in the evaluation of their activities.

According to Trow (1994), evaluative procedures generally tend to be to the advantage of those in charge of the procedures in order either to develop management changes or to provide information upon which political decisions can be made. In contrast, supportive mechanisms aim at helping the evaluated units or institutions. These two dimensions need, then, to be combined with the different sources of control in order to construct a four-level typology of quality assurance procedures. Trow's approach has the main advantage of combining the source of control of the procedures with the type of procedures developed. His four-level typology allows for a clearer distinction of different types of quality assurance procedures: internal-supportive; internal evaluative, external supportive and external evaluative (CRE 1997).

2.3.4 The General Model of Quality Assurance Mechanism

Van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) identified several common elements of a general model of quality assessment in HE, based on the sources of quality assessment in Medieval universities and on the recent experiences with quality assessment in North-American and Western European countries:

- The existence of an independent agency that has the responsibility to manage the HE system at a meta-level.
- Quality assessment systems are always based on self-evaluation (or self-study, self-assessment). This element is deduced from the experiences of North American and the Western European countries.

- Peer review and site-visit system
- Reporting of the quality assessment exercises' result, as well as of the methods used.
- The possible relationship between the outcomes of a quality assessment system and the governmental decisions about the funding of higher education activities.

According to Lee Harvey (1999), most external quality methodologies incorporate various combinations of three basic elements:

- Self-assessment
- Peer evaluation
- Statistical or performance indicators.

Chapter Three: China and UK's Higher Education Systems

In this chapter, the China and UK's higher education systems are introduced from the historical experience until their present development. At the same time, the development of both countries' quality assurance systems is elaborated. For China, the establishment of the New China in 1949, as well as the end of the Culture Revolution and the implementation of a cost-sharing policy in HE are important events. For the UK HE system, the move from a binary to a unitary system is a dividing line.

The 1980s saw an increasing influence of the political authorities over HE, with Quality Assurance Systems (QAS) gaining a good deal of momentum all over the world, although with different levels of maturity and capacity in the various countries (Perellon, 2007). From 1990, quality assurance in higher education has become a core issue in many countries. According to the OECD, over the last fifteen years more than 60 countries have established their own national quality assurance systems for higher education (El-Khawas, 2001). The second part of this chapter will introduce the quality assurance policies of both China and UK.

3.1 China's higher education system

China in this research means the mainland China. The modern China's higher education system can be traced back to 1898. After being defeated in the 'Opium War' in 1840, the Qing Dynasty had to open the door to western countries. China abolished the civil service examination system and established a modern school system based on Western models. The government was forced to allow western missionaries to open schools in some big cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin.

In 1922 it adopted the American model, and this dominated the Chinese higher education system until 1949 (Bai, 2006). By then, China had 205 higher education institutions: 124 public universities, 21 missionary-run universities and 60 private universities and colleges, with a total enrolment of 117,000 students.

3.1.1 Initial Phase: 1949-1978

Before the China's civil war (before 1949), the Chinese higher education system consisted of state universities (60.4%), private universities (29.7%), and church universities (9.7%) (Levin, 1991), being a blending of the American and Japanese higher education model. During the period of foundation of People's Republic of China, in 1949, two opposing forces—the centralized Soviet education model and the informal Chinese education model—generated the current two overlapping systems: the regular higher education system and the adult higher education system.

The basic structure of China's higher education system was set up at the beginning of 1950s after the founding of the new country (Liu & Zhang, 2004). From 1949 to 1953, the number of comprehensive universities was reduced from 49 to 13 (See figure 8), accompanied by a severe reduction of university places in the fields of humanities and social sciences, which decreased dramatically from 33.1% to 14.9% of the university places (Ouyang 2004, p.141). The Chinese government aimed to achieve two goals through the higher education system: "First, it should have the right political nature; it should belong to the new government led by the Chinese Communist Party. Second, it should directly serve the needs of the rapid economic development taking place in the new country" (Ouyang 2004, p.141). In 1950 the first national conference regulated the aims of higher education:

> "*to educate workers for national construction who will have a high cultural level, will possess modern scientific and technical accomplishments and will serve wholeheartedly the people by*

means of the teaching method known as 'the unity of theory and practice' " (Hayhoe 1989, p.68).

The most prominent – and disastrous – example of this general policy was the 'the great leap forward in industry and elsewhere' starting in 1958 and ending in 1962. Between 1957 and 1960, the number of higher education institutions grew from 229 to 1,289 (Hayhoe 1989, p.72). This huge increase seemed to have been considered rather exaggerated even by the Chinese government and subsequently the number of HEIs was reduced again to 610 in 1962, and continued to decrease to 434 in 1965 (China Statistical Yearbook 1996). However, the ratio between university students and inhabitants grew from 6.8 for every 10,000 in 1957 to 9.3 for every 10,000 in 1965 (China Statistical Yearbook 1999).

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), as a mass movement, was an idealistic experiment sponsored by the Communist Party of China (CCP) radical leaders to empower the grass roots with the belief that successful social economic and political development should be engineered from below rather than from above. The Revolution started as a bottom-up struggle against 'Soviet revisionism' and the 'capitalist roaders'. The Cultural Revolution stopped all formal education including higher education and a decade of deterioration set in. An entire generation was uneducated. This was a disaster for the Chinese educational system and repercussions were felt for a considerable amount of time. Until 1978, the National College Entrance Examination was put in place again. China's higher education system was restored since then.

3.1.2 Transitional Phase: 1979 – 1997

In 1978, China began an opening up policy in all aspects of its society, including the education sector. In 1978, the National Entrance Exam system was restored. That year, about 5.7 million candidates took the exams and about 270,000 were admitted to higher

education, i.e. a mere 4.7% (China Education Newspaper 2007). The academic degree system was reintroduced, with bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees, and a post-doctoral research system was set up. At that time, there were no tuition fees for all students. This second structural change was carried out in 1985 in this broad context of opening up and reform in the education sector. This reform, along with other changes since the end of the Culture Revolution, has been characterized as the "3Ds" and "3Cs." The "3Ds" include decentralization, depoliticization, and diversities. The "3Cs" refer to commercialization, competition, and cooperation.

Because more students enrolled in HEIS, the government could not afford the cost for all forms of education. In 1989, an experiment of the cost-sharing theory was first applied to a small proportion of students. The funding system was changed from a situation where the government provided most part of financial support to the students to another one where fees were introduced to finance the costs of higher education.

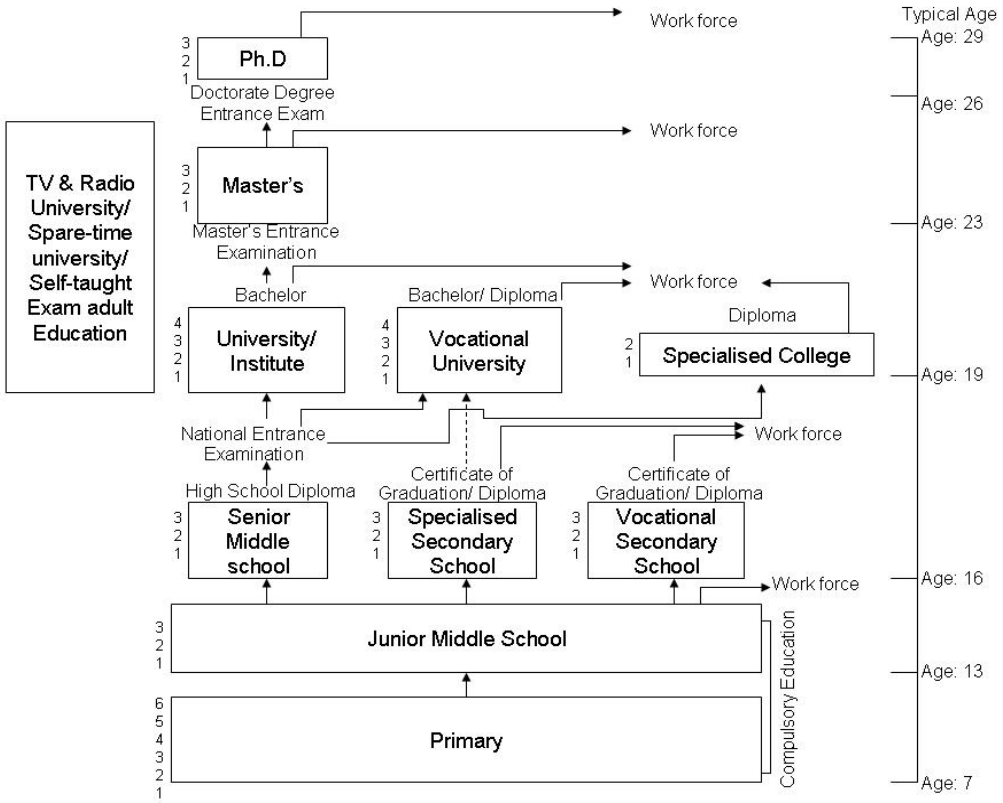

Figure 6: China's education system – primary school, secondary school and higher education. (Adapted

from Brandenburg & Zhu, 2007)

3.1.3 Booming Stage: 1997 – present

China has witnessed a rapid and steady growth in the 1990s, although this great expansion is now under serious debate. Higher education in China generally consists of four levels: post-secondary vocational education (at junior college level), undergraduate education, graduate education for a master's degree, and graduate education for a doctoral degree (see figure 6). Both private and public institutions offer higher education. Private higher education providers comprise three groups: private colleges, independent colleges (which are linked to public universities), and dependent colleges that charge tuition for students undertaking higher education self-study examinations. This last sector – dependent colleges are a fast growing part of the Chinese higher education system.

In order to have an idea of the Chinese higher education system growth it is worth to mention that in 1990, there were no private institutions in the country, while in 2007, 297 private institutions have been created, enrolling 1,630,000. Within the public sector there are also different types of higher education providers, including regular college education institutions (colleges and universities, research institutes, junior colleges and independent colleges), adult higher education institutions, distance education and online education.

Since the establishment of the Chinese Republic of China, the Chinese government elaborates every five years, a National Five-year Plan that establishes the development of every aspect in society, including economy, politics, education, etc. The 9th National Five-year Plan (1996-2000), included two governmental strategic goals, one being the expansion of the higher education system, and the other the building up of world-class universities. In 1997, a tuition fee regime was introduced in all of China. Furthermore, the

Ministry of Education established that by 2005, that is by the end of 10th Five-year Plan, there must be 16 million students enrolled in higher education, including 600,000 in postgraduate degree programmes, leading to a gross participation rate at the age group of 18-22 of about 15%. For 2010 it was established that the number of university students should reach the 23 million, including 2 million of postgraduate students, and the gross participation rate should rise to around 20%. So far these goals have already been reached.

In 1999, the Chinese government expected China's higher education system could move from an elite to a massified one. The gross participation rate increased from 3.5% in 1991 to 23.3% in 2008 (see figure 7).

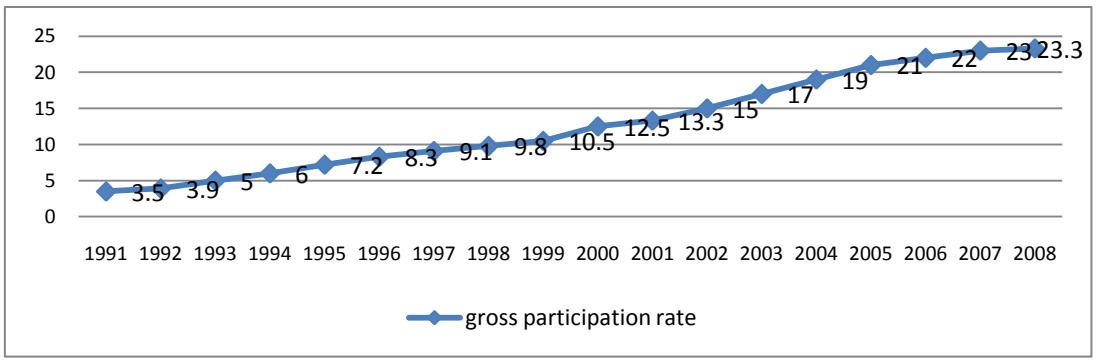

Figure 7: China's gross participation rate of total population age (18-22) from 1991 to 2008

(source: China National Statistic Database (1991-2008)

Number of Higher Education Institutions

	1949	**1965**	**1978**	**1980**	**1985**	**2000**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Regular HEIs	205	434	598	675	1016	1041	1792	1867	1908	2263
Institutions Providing Postgraduate Programs						738	766	767	795	796
Adult HEIs	1	964	10395	2775	1216	772	481	444	413	400
Non-state/private HEIs							1077	994	906	866

HEIs' Staff and Workers (1949-2008)

Unit: 10,000

	1949	**1965**	**1978**	**1980**	**1985**	**2000**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Regular HEIs	4.60	33.30	51.80	63.20	87.06	111.28	174.21	187.26	197.45	205.10
Adult HEIs				6.45	14.34	18.70	14.89	14	13.63	8.99
Non-state/private HEIs							4.81	4.59	4.33	4.03

Number of Student Enrollment

Unit: 10,000

	1949	**1965**	**1978**	**1980**	**1985**	**2000**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**
Postgraduate Students	0.0629	0.4546	1.0934	2.1604	8.7331	30.1239	97.8610	110.4653	119.5047	128.3046
Undergraduates in Regular HEIs	11.65	33.30	51.80	63.20	87.06	111.28	174.21	187.26	197.45	205.10
Undergraduates in Adult HEIs	0.01	41.30	140.80	155.40	172.50	353.64	436.07	524.88	524.16	548.29

Figure 8**:** China's Higher Education System 1949-2008

The massification has also contributed to the raise of a series of problems for higher education institutions. China started to struggle with the issue of quality in education. One of the tasks for the educational development of China, established in the 11th Five Year Plan (2006-2011) is to improve the quality of higher education in China. Consequently, the government has announced that it intends to slow the rate at which higher education has been growing, from an estimated 23 million students in 2006 to 25-27 million by 2020.

3.1.4 Main features of the Chinese higher education system

Transition of state steering & control

Chinese HEIs have been considered as final socialist territory steered and fully financially supported by Chinese government. Before 1985, Chinese HE system adopted the USSR HE system. Chinese HEIs were operated under an over-centralized state control model. Provincial and municipal bureaus were just mediators.

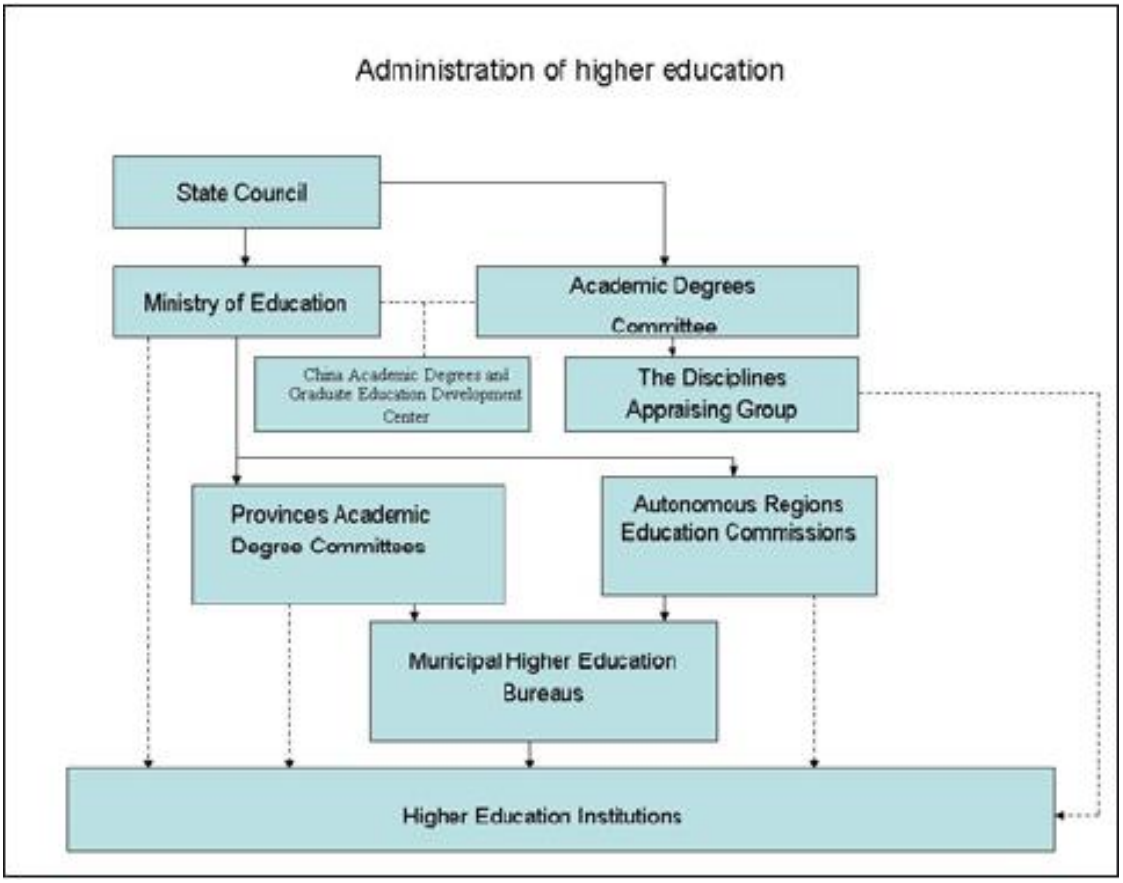

Figure 9: Administration of higher education in China (*Source: Finnish National Board of Education)*

With the economic open-up policy in 1978, two programmes made by the Chinese Communist Party, in 1985 *"Decision on the Reform of the Educational System"* and successively in 1993 the *"Programme for Education Reform and Development in China"* provided a kind of autonomy to Chinese HEIs, and the governance model shifted from a rigid state control to a certain degree of state supervision (Mok, 2003). Nevertheless, if one resort to Clark (1983) model, China's HE system is still closest to the state authority corner of the triangle. State-supervision means that the government sees its task only as one of supervising the HE system in terms of assuring (academic) quality and maintaining a certain

level of accountability for the use of public funds (Boer & Goedegebuure, 2003). Quality evaluation has appeared in exchanged for autonomy, to monitor HEIs from a distance (Neave & Van Vught, 1994).

Structural change – Decentraliation, marketization & privatization

Since the open-up policy, China's HE system has been challenged to adapt to the dynamic demands of a market-oriented economy under the socialist political environment. China's government found that the state steering badly influenced the autonomy and diversification of the HEIs, and HEIs were not flexible according to the rapidly changing demands. Gradually Chinese government took two measures to try to improve the situation - decentralization and marketization.

Decentralization refers to relinquishing the central government control and responsibility for the provision and management of education to the provincial and municipal levels. This policy not only allows provincial government to have more authority over HEIs, but opens up the way for private organizations and even individuals to operate schools (figure 9 & figure10). The *marketization* of education means the creation of an educational market where private individuals and organizations can compete with the public schools for consumers and even run schools for profit.

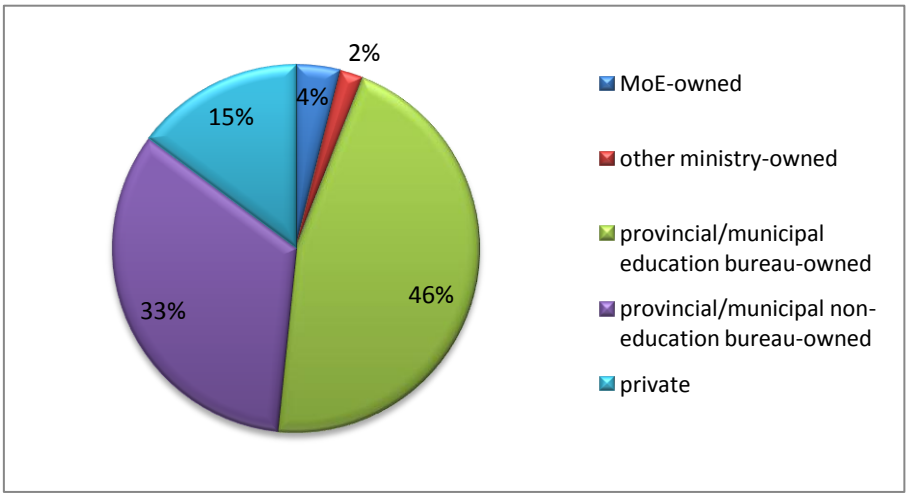

Figure 10: Undergraduate HEIs in China (Source: MoE (2006)

Through decentralization and marketization, the Chinese government opened up the doors for fundamental changes in the orientation, financing, curriculum, and management of education (Agelasto & Adamson, 1998). Local governments have now more responsibilities in higher education financing, provision and management. Private HEIs were established in China. National evaluation systems developed in association with the political rhetoric of decentralization and the delegation of responsibility from the state to higher education institutions (Gornitzka & Maassen, 2000).

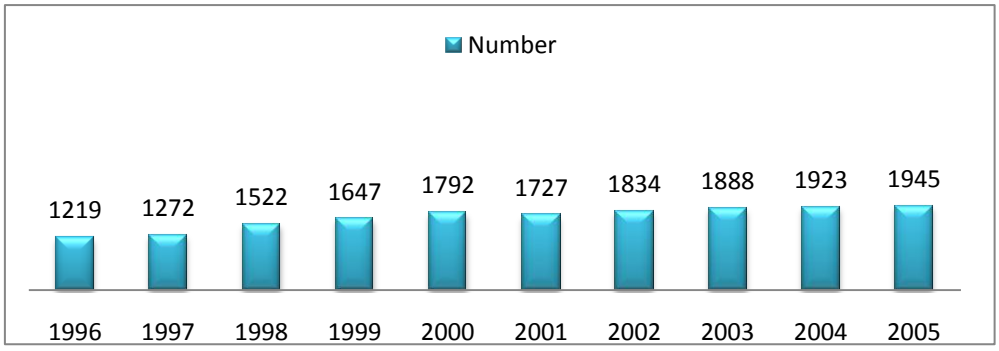

Figure 11: Chinese private universities (degree and non-degree) 1996 – 2001(Source: Mok (2005)

Governmental policy

Coupled with the structural reforms mentioned above, policies regarding higher education have gone through a major *reorientation*, shifting away from an elite-based education system to a mass-oriented education system (OECD, 2003). In 2007, the total number of

enrolled students in China's HEIs boosted to 17million and now China has the largest number of students in HE in the world – having recently passed the United States in total enrolments (Altbach, 2004). This dramatic increase in students' numbers exerts a negative effect on the quality of HEIs, and makes a great pressure on the financing of the system. Meanwhile, the massification creates a demand for transparency and accountability.

Diversification of financing – a cost-sharing system

If HEIs depended only on the government it would be very difficult to accommodate the pressing demands of students to access HE. In 1997, a cost-sharing policy was fully introduced in Chinese higher education. This type of financing policy not only placed more responsibility on students and parents to finance the HE system, but also changed the way students hunt for jobs. Since 1978, the graduates were assigned jobs by the central government according to different needs in the society and the birth origin of the graduates. But after the implementation of the cost-sharing, the graduates have to find jobs in the job market by themselves. Therefore the employment is transferred from a governmental assignment to guarantee graduates jobs to a self-effort from graduates that have to find their own jobs. With the fierce competition in the job market and more high-demanding job opportunities, the consumers of HEIs, students, parents and employers started to become conscious of the differences in quality provided by the various HEIs. Quality evaluation is now seen as an indicator for them to use in this context.

Stratification

In tandem of state supervision and structural change, the financing of HEIs has gone through dramatic changes as well. At present, a stratified approach is employed and higher education institutions are classified into different categories of status (eg: Project 211 & Project 985) and accordingly receive financing and other provisions from different sources, that is, from national, provincial, or municipal governments. Of the total of about 1, 942 HEIs, only just

over 73 are now under the direct supervision of the MoE (2006). The rest are supervised and funded by provincial or municipal governments. In this way, quality evaluation policy is like a competitive allocating mechanism and government needs this mechanism to legitimate its different financial support to different HEIs according to their performance in the quality evaluation process.

Proliferation of actors and sectors.

According to the Article 14, the Education Law, the state encourages all sectors of society, including enterprises, institutions, public organizations or groups as well as individual citizens, to run higher education institutions in accordance with law and to participate in and support the reform and development of higher education. The various actors and sectors need timely and accurate information about the education as well as the labor market - regulations and policies, fees, quality, accreditation, curricular, pedagogy, skill demand and supply, employment prospects (Dahlman, 2007b).

3.2 Quality Assurance Mechanisms in China

3.2.1 Chinese Quality Assurance Agencies

At national level

There are two quality assurance agencies at the national level. One is the higher education evaluation centre (HEEC). Assessment of the quality of teaching started as early as 1990. This was emphasized in the Higher Education Act of 1995, and such evaluations were carried out in more than two hundred institutions by 2003. HEEC was established on 26 October 2004. HEEC is an administrative body under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. This Centre is mandated to carry out academic evaluation of teaching in each institution of higher education every five years, based on the guidelines, regulations, and evaluation criteria of the MoE, and to report its findings to the Ministry of Education. This

Center ranks institutions as excellent, good, pass and failure. In addition, every institution is now required to report data on its teaching activities to the Ministry every year (Huang, 2005).

The other one is the China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre (CDGDC), which was established in 2003, evolving as one department from the National Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre affiliated to Tsinghua University. CDGDC was inaugurated in 1994 with the name of The Evaluation Institute of Academic Degrees & Graduate Education in HEIs then. In 1998, the institute was merged with the "National Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre", being changed into "China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre (CDGDC)" in 2003. CDGDC is an administrative department directly under the MoE, operating under the joint leadership of The Ministry of Education and The Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council (ADCSC). CDGDC is also a non-profit agency with the independent qualification of legal entity. CDGDC is composed of 6 departments, such as the Evaluation Department and the Accreditation Department. Its main function is to engage in scientific research into academic degrees and graduate education, providing counselling for The Ministry of Education and The Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council in formulating policies concerned and to undertake the task of evaluating and appraising the academic degrees and graduate education, entrusted by The Ministry of Education and The Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council.

Besides the two national agencies above, there is also a no permanent organization named National Audit Committee for Establishment (NACE) of New HEIs or Programs in the MoE, which deals with the affairs of approval of new establishment or programs.

At local level

There are about 20 local quality assurance agencies in China, among which the earliest one is Shanghai Educational Evaluation Institution (SEEI) established in 1996. The second earliest one is Jiangsu Educational Evaluation Agency （JEEA） established in 1997. However, agencies in different provinces have different delegated power and conduct different evaluation activities. Some of these local quality assurance agencies are not only in charge of higher education evaluation but also the evaluation of other education levels lower than higher education. The local quality assurance agencies in China can be divided into three categories, which are *independent* like SEEI，JEEA etc, *affiliated to* HEI or Provincial Academy of education research, such as Liaoning Educational Evaluation Office, and *private but non-profit*, such as Jiangxi Higher Educational Evaluation Office etc.

The Chinese quality assurance system can be simply described as having three levels under the frame of law. Therefore, the HEIs will have to be reviewed by national and local agencies as well as its internal quality assurance offices at three levels and from different dimensions. The three-dimensional framework of Chinese higher education quality assurance has integrated the macro aspects with the micro, combined the internal factors with the external, and unified the strengths of government, institutions and society. We can also name the as a system "from-top-to-bottom, from-external-to-internal" model of quality assurance.

3.2.2 Project 211 & Project 985

China invests per year approximately 3.7 billion RMB in Project 211 and another 2.8 billion RMB in Project 985 compared to an overall annual investment in the higher education institutions of slightly less than 101 billion RMB (China Statistical Yearbook 2006, Table 21-37). In other words, 6.4% of the overall funding is put *additionally* into elite education.

Government wants to educate elite students and establish world-class universities. Chinese government has had a policy of giving priority funding to its top universities. Since the mid 1990s, two state programmes described as 'pivotal' in modernizing and enhancing the quality of higher education have been introduced:

Project 211

In 1995, the Project 211 was established by the Ministry of Education. The Project 211 is often explained as an attempt by the central government to establish 100 key universities in China in the 21st Century. By 2002, the central government had invested 18 billion RMB in 99 institutions as part of Project 211. The main goals were:

- ✧ the improvement of overall institutional capacity;
- ✧ the development of key disciplinary areas;
- ✧ the building of a higher education public service framework.

Project 985

In 1998, President Jiang Zemin declared that "China must have a number of first-rate universities of international advanced level" in his speech at the conference celebrating Peking University's centennial (MoE, 2000, p17). Therefore, the synonym of "Project 985" is the "The Project for Funding World-class Universities" (Li, 2004). The effort to improve the quality of education was given another boost with the introduction of the so-called Project 985 (it is named as such because it was announced in May 1998). The aim was to provide additional funding to create more world-class universities and key disciplines. Once again, the Peking and Tsinghua universities were singled out to be the major receivers of funds, but in the meantime another 38 universities have received Project 985 investments from central and local authorities.

3.2.3 The Quality Assessment Policy for Undergraduate Programmes

The Chinese HE system is dominated by public universities providing undergraduate education (Liu & Rosa, 2008). Starting in 2002, a 5-year cycle evaluation policy which focuses on the teaching quality and learning outcomes of undergraduate programmes was implemented. The programmes evaluated are classified into four levels: excellent, good, qualified and not qualified. The establishment of the Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC) of the Ministry of Education in August 2004 marks a new stage for the development of a systematic and professional evaluation system of higher education in China (MoE). The details of the quality assessment policy will be elaborated in chapter four.

3.3 The UK's Higher Education System

3.3.1 The Early Higher Education System

England, a country of modest size and population, made a surprisingly prominent contribution to early university development (Clark & Neave, 1992). UK's higher education institutions are originated from the establishment of Oxford University and Cambridge University in 1264 and 1284 respectively. Since the establishment of Oxford University and Cambridge University, UK has its own higher education institutions. Until the early 19th century, they were the only universities in England. At first, the "Victorian expansion" led to the creation of twelve universities 36. Then, during the 20th century, London sponsored colleges were set up. This expansion was met by the upgrading of ten colleges of advanced technology into formal technological universities. Until the mid-1980s, all these institutions enjoyed a large autonomy based on the principle of academic freedom.

3.3.2 The Binary System Before 1992

UK's higher education system before 1992 can be grouped into three categories: universities, polytechnics and colleges and institutes. Universities were treated officially (until 1991) as equals, and seen as more academic than other higher education institutions. Polytechnics were originated from 1960s from diverse bodies and were more vocationally oriented. Colleges and institutions were mainly local and some more specialized than others. In May 1991 the Government published a White Paper, "Higher Education: A New Framework", which aimed at abolishing the binary system in universities and polytechnics and let polytechnics acquire a university title.

3.3.3 Unified System after 1992

There are over 180 universities and colleges of higher education in the UK. Approximately 1.8 million students are currently enrolled in the UK higher education system; about one third of young people go on to higher education at age 18 (with almost 50% of students in Scotland), and an increasing number of "mature" students are studying either full-time or part-time for university degrees. Higher education is a current policy priority for the government, with a target set to attract 50% of 18- to 30-year-olds to higher education by 2010.

Undergraduate degrees take three years to complete in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, while at Scottish universities they last four years. At the graduate level, a master's degree is normally earned in a single year, a research master's degree takes two years and a doctoral degree is often completed in three years. Professional courses, such as medicine, veterinary medicine, law and teaching, usually are undertaken as five-year undergraduate degrees.

Characteristics of higher education in UK

According to Peter Williams (2006) , the chief executive of QAA, the characteristics of HE in UK is as follow:

- HE policy is devolved to national governments – England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Therefore, there are four different QA systems.
- HEIs are formally private, self-governing organizations, originally association of scholars. They are not owned by the government, so they have full academic autonomy.
- Once officially recognized, they have unlimited powers to award their own degrees and other qualifications.
- There is no programme accreditation system (HEIs are self-accrediting.)
- The government has strong indirect control over HE via funding.

Autonomy

The UK HEIs are autonomous, self-governing institutions, even though most of them are entirely funded by the government through higher education funding councils. Some of these institutions have the power to award degrees: since 1992 all the universities have been allocated this power by the Privy Council, upon the advice of Government. Higher education institutions without a proper degree awarding power have to prepare students for degrees awarded by authorized universities under a licensing or 'validation' arrangement.

At present, each higher education institution is responsible for the standards and quality of its academic awards and programmes. Each institution features its own internal procedure for attaining appropriate standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of the education provided. In particular, they consider two points: 1) students' assessment of students; 2) procedures for programme design, approval, monitoring and reviewing. Most institutions both regularly monitor and periodically review programmes. The monitoring activity

evaluates how effective a programme is and how successful students are in meeting the learning outcomes. This activity is generally performed by the department providing the programme, usually at the end of an academic year. The monitoring process may also consider reports from external examiners, staff and student feedback or reports of any professional body that accredits the programme. The results obtained can determine some adjustments to the curriculum or to students' assessment procedures to ensure continued effectiveness.

The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) was established in 1964 for the validation of programmes at higher education institutions, such as polytechnics and higher education colleges, which did not have their own degree-awarding powers. A number of 'new universities' were founded in the 1960s, following the publication of the government sponsored.

Under the Education Reform Act 1988, polytechnics and higher education colleges in England and Wales were removed from local authority control, and became autonomous institutions. They were funded by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council in England and by the then Welsh Office or Welsh local authorities in Wales. The Act created a separate body, the Universities Funding Council, to fund universities in England and Wales. In Northern Ireland, the merger in 1984 of the Ulster Polytechnic with the New University of Ulster to form the University of Ulster removed the division between universities and polytechnics and colleges.

In England and Wales there remained a 'binary divide' between the university sector and the public/polytechnic sector. However, as universities began to offer vocational courses and work alongside business and their local communities, and non-university institutions undertook scholarship and research, the distinction between them became unclear. The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 abolished the binary divide and reformed the

structure of higher education in England and Wales into a single sector. It dissolved the Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council, and created two new bodies to fund all higher education institutions in their respective areas – the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). It dissolved the CNAA and enabled the former polytechnics to gain degree-awarding powers and to use the word 'university' in their title. Other higher education institutions were able to apply to the Privy Council for taught degree-awarding powers, research degree-awarding powers and university title.

3.4 Quality Assurance in England

3.4.1 Quality Assurance Agency

Higher education institutions in the United Kingdom are subject to overlapping systems of quality assurance for teaching and learning (Fang, 2010). External quality audit systems and quality assessment have supplemented a range of existing arrangements that include professional accreditation in certain subjects, regional accrediting consortia, inter-institutional subject-based networks, an external examiner system, and the internal quality control mechanisms within many institutions (Stanley and Patrick, 1998). There are four main quality organisations in England. Those are the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

HEFCE

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), created by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, is an organisation playing an active role in government processes in managing higher education by the distribution of funding to universities and

colleges of Higher and Further Education in England since 1992. HEFCE currently supports five teaching initiatives: Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL), the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme, the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), and the Higher Education Academy (HEFCE, 2009).

HEQC

The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) was founded in May 1992 by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (CVCP), Committee of Directors of Polytechnics (CDP), Conference of Scottish Centrally Funded Colleges (SCFC) and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP). Its objectives are to support institutional self-regulation and to demonstrate to the system's various stakeholders that effective regulatory mechanisms are in place.

HEA

The Higher Education Academy (HEA), an independent organisation, founded in May 2004, was funded by grants from the four UK higher education funding bodies, subscriptions from higher education institutions, and grant and contract income for specific initiatives, and was established as the result of a merger of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE), the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), and the TQEF National Co-ordination Team (NCT).The vision of the HEA is for students in UK higher education to enjoy the highest quality learning experience in the world. HEA works with individual academics to give them access to professional recognition, advice and support, as well as networking and development opportunities to enhance their teaching (HEA, 2009).

3.4.2 Academic Infrastructure

The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points which give all institutions a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the quality and standards of their higher education courses (www.qaa.ac.uk). There are four elements in the Academic Infrastructure. The code of practice is about the management of quality and the other three elements advise the HEIs about setting standards.

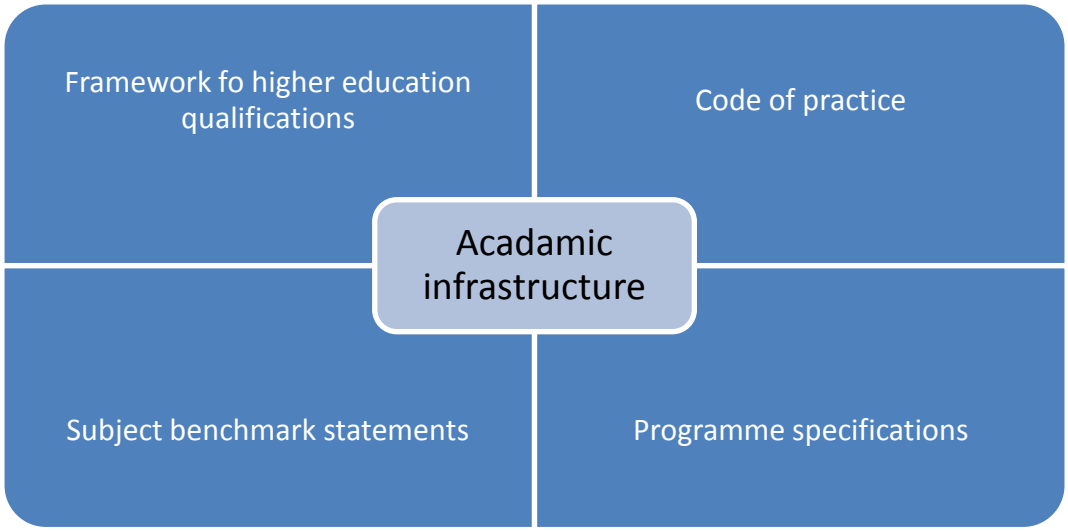

Figure 12: four elements of the Academic Infrastructure (www.qaa.ac.uk)

3.4.3 Institutional Audit by the QAA

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in April 1997, as an independent body. It performs institutional audits, which are a mean of checking if HEIs are dealing properly with their academic quality and standards through effective 'quality assurance' policies and procedures; they are also a way of checking that the HEIs publishing information about quality and standards is true and not distorted (Williams, 2007). Institutional audits take place every six years.

In 2006 the QAA published a handbook for institutions to set out the audit process.This

handbook was revised in September 2009. In this handbook, the mission of QAA is defined to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of HE qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE (www.qaa.com). Institutional audits are currently the review process of HEIs in England and Northern Ireland (www.qaa.ac.uk), for which QAA is providing £8 million per year. QAA encourages each institution to be responsible for the standards and quality of its academic awards and programs. Each has to set up its own internal procedures for attaining appropriate standards, and assuring and enhancing the quality of its provision, mainly through the assessment of students and the institutional procedures for the design, approval monitoring and review of programs. Audits are implemented by peer review of academics who review HEIs' quality and standards. Some of the peer review members are from the industry and professional world.

After every audit, the QAA publishes a report on the audit team's findings. In 2002, the Quality Assurance Framework of England combined the institutional audit with the quality assurance framework. The focus of the audit process is the students and their learning. Institutional audit aims to encourage the institutions to be self-evaluative, and it is a process that offers opportunities for enhancement of institutional management of standards and quality (www.qaa.ac.uk). From 2002 to 2005 in England, an experiment has been made with institutional audits of disciplines. The revised institutional cycle was extend from 2005-2006 to 2010-2011, and the first visits of the revised method took place in January 2007 (Revised Institutional Audit Handbook, 2009). In 2006, the QAA proposed each institution's place in the schedule of audits. The first audit with the first institutions under the revised institutional audit process also took place in the spring of 2006. The training of the auditors was provided in the summer and autumn of 2006.

Chapter Four: China and UK Quality Assurance Systems: a comparative analysis

In this chapter, a comparative analysis of the Chinese and UK quality assurance policies is undertaken. More specifically the quality assessment policy for undergraduate degree programmes in China and the institutional audit policy in UK are compared, resorting to Perellon's comparative analytical framework (2001). The analysis framework employed encompasses five elements: the objectives of the quality assurance policy, the control of the policy domain, the areas of investigation, the procedures to be applied and the use of the information collected. Due to the limited time and space, and the differences and complexity among UK quality assurance sub-systems in England, Scotland and Wales, I will just focus on the English teaching and learning quality assurance policy – the institutional audit policy, comparing it with the Chinese quality assessment policy for undergraduate degree program.

4.1 The Status Quo Ante

As previously referred, English HE was characterized by the existence of a binary divide before the reform in 1992. Traditionally universities in England were largely autonomous from the political authorities and government. Quality was by large an exclusively internal matter, the most significant quality assurance mechanism being the system of external examination. On the other side of the binary divide, the polytechnics were under the tight control of the Local Education Authorities (LEA). Moreover, external scrutiny of these institutions' activities was exercised by the Council for National Academic Award (CNAA). It was on this general ground that the debates around quality assurance in HE emerged in the early 1980s.

In China, quality assurance in higher education became a political issue with the great expansion in 1997, when the cost sharing policy was implemented in higher education as well. According to the cost sharing theory, who benefit the higher education should pay for it. Parents in China cover the main part of the cost in higher education institutions. Parents and students have the rights to know the quality of the HEIs. On the other hand, after the great expansion from 1997, the negative complaints about the quality of HE from the society are rising. Therefore, the trust should be re-established between the society and the HEIs. The quality assessment policy is a trustworthy mechanism to establish the relationship.

4.2 The Status Quo Post

In England, after the reform of the higher education, from the binary system to the unitary system, the issue of quality assurance had become a cornerstone. The structure of the higher education system shows the transformation throughout the higher education system. The objectives of the policy domain combine summative and formative arrangements and place a substantial emphasis on meeting accountability requirements. These are outcome-oriented and combine qualitative and quantitative techniques for the collection of data. With the summative objectives, the data collected is widely publicised and often displayed by the press in the form of rankings.

In China, the research outcomes seem like a unique standard for the academic staff to get promotion and get reward. One reason is that research is easier to quantify than teaching. Therefore, many professors focus more on research rather than classroom teaching activity. To enable universities to shift the focus of their work from research to teaching and learning quality, especially on classroom teaching, the “Action Plan of Education Innovation 2003-2007” was announced by the MoE. In the Plan it was established that all institutions would be assessed in a five-year cycle and the Higher Education Evaluation

Center (HEEC) was established, with the responsibility of implementing the assessment (MoE, 2005). A "Teaching assessment of undergraduate education project" was developed by the MoE in 2002 and modified in 2004 (MoE, 2004). The guiding principle for the assessment was to promote "evaluation to enhance improvement, to facilitate change, and to strengthen management, emphasising change". The assessment results were divided in four categories: "Excellent," "Good," "Qualified," and "Unqualified". It aimed to promote undergraduate teaching, and to improve the quality of undergraduate education.

4.3 Policy Dimensions

4.3.1 Policy Beliefs – ideational dimension

Generally speaking, policy beliefs are the ideas and standpoints about one specific policy. In England from the very beginning objectives of the policy domain were in the belief that public money had to be used efficiently. This was the case for all sectors of public activity and deeply affected HE. Of the different interpretations of quality, fitness for purpose (Harvey & Green, 1993) has become the mostly evidently employed one in UK higher education (Lomas, 2002; Ottewill & Macfarlane, 2004). Since 1997 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has overseen the quality of the HEIs in UK in terms of fitness for purpose, and checked the institution's arrangements for maintaining academic standards (QAA, 2006b). In the institutional Audit Handbook (2009), the QAA's mission is defined as to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of HE qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE. Therefore, the mission of the QAA can be understood as to safeguard the public money is used effectively and efficiently.

In China, the government regards the improvement of quality assurance policy as its responsibility. As a communist country, the relationship between the government and the

HEIs is still based on the state control model. Even if nowadays it is changing gradually to a model of state supervision, it will still take a long way for the HEIs in China to have full autonomy. Therefore, the policy beliefs in China still consider as adequate to maintain the state control over the management of HE.

4.3.2 Policy Instruments – material dimension

The second dimension relates to the policy instruments through which the policy beliefs are translated into practice (Perellon, 2001). What is the instrument the authority uses in the process of implementing the policies? In England, the expansion of higher education took place before the quality assurance became a prominent political issue. The institutional audit policy in England aims at letting the HEIs with the responsibility of their own quality and accountability to the society and the government. The discussion of the China issue indicates that the quality assurance became a real issue only from 1997 onwards when the great expansion took place.

4.4 Differences

The divergence of the quality assurance policy in both countries will be analyzed from the perspective of objectives, control, areas, procedures and uses (refer to figure 12).

4.4.1 Objectives

The quality assurance mechanism used in the Chinese higher education sector was external evaluation, presenting a summative form with the emphasis on the results. The use of this mechanism is the main reason why the evaluation procedure was over-elaborated and involved a substantial amount of time and a number of experts (Li *et al*, 2009).

According to the Quality Assessment Policy of Undergraduate Degree Programmes, the following objectives for the 2002 quality assessment policy are established:

> The quality evaluation policy is initiated to promote educational reforms and improvement, and enhance educational administration. The quality evaluation and educational improvement should be combined, whilst improvement should be stressed. In addition, the quality evaluation is an instrument to intensify the state's macro-management and guidance and to encourage all departments of educational administration to support teaching in higher education institutions. It can be used to direct universities to implement the educational guidance of the state, improve the teaching conditions, ameliorate the educational infrastructure, strengthen the teaching management, change some traditional teaching methods, and improve the educational quality. (MoE, 2002)

According to QAA's handbook (2009) for institutional audit: England and North Ireland (QAA, 2010) "meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges in England and Northern Ireland have:

- effective means of ensuring that the awards and qualifications in HE are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner;
- effective means of providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those HE awards and qualifications;
- effective means of enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

The handbook also refers to the objectives of the process as being to (QAA, 2010)

- ensure that the academic standards of UK HE awards and qualifications are maintained and securely managed;
- enable students and other stakeholders to have confidence in the proper management of the quality of learning opportunities offered through the programmes of study that lead to those awards;
- check that effective arrangements are in place to maintain appropriate academic standards and enhance the quality of postgraduate research programmes;
- contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms and agencies in HE, to thepromotion and enhancement of quality in teaching, learning and assessment;
- ensure that students, employers and others can have ready access to easily understood, reliable and meaningful public information about the extent to which the HEIs in England and Northern Ireland are individually offering programmes of study, awards and qualifications that meet national expectations in respect of academic standards and quality of provision;
- ensure that, if the management of academic standards or of the quality of provision is found to be weak or seriously deficient, the process forms a basis for ensuring rapid action to improve it.

Therefore, the explicit objective of the quality assessment policy of the Chinese quality assurance is to promote educational reforms and improvement, the implicit objective of the policy being is to intensify the state's macro-management and guidance (Liu & Rosa, 2008). China's quality assessment policy for undergraduate programmes focuses more on the outcome of the process. England's institutional audit is more focused on the process.

4.4.2 Control

China's HEEC is an administrative body under the governance of the MoE of China. Its

funding comes mainly from the budget allocated by the government, and its main responsibility is to organise and implement evaluations based on the guidelines, regulations, and evaluation criteria laid down by the MoE.

The England's QAA was a charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is an independent body, governed by a Board and managed by an Executive Committee, funded through subscriptions from higher education institutions and through contracts with the major funding councils. One of the QAA's core functions is to carry out reviews and audits and report publicly on how universities and other higher education providers maintain the quality of the learning opportunities they offer to students and the academic standards of the awards they made. According to the revised institutional audit handbook (2009), the QAA will make every effort to ensure that a close and constructive working relationship is established with institutions.

4.4.3 Areas

Regarding the function of the quality policy for Chinese undergraduate degree programmes it is based on quality assurance while in the case of England it is quality enhancement. Quality assurance is about improving and stabilising production and associated processes to avoid or at least minimise the issues that led to the defects in the first place. In the higher education sector quality assurance prioritises accountability, which is the assurance of a unit to its stakeholders that it provides education of good quality (Harvey and Newton, 2007). Quality enhancement is the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities (QAA, 2006).

Chinese universities relied on an external quality assurance system - that is government assessment. However, quality assurance in English universities relies on internal quality

assurance mechanisms such as programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic reviews. In English universities there were a range of methods to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching such as external and internal student feedback questionnaires, effective staff development, peer review of teaching, effective team teaching, and induction and mentoring of new staff. Many institutions have mandatory student feedback questionnaires as summative evaluations at the end of each course, using standard questions across all courses. In China, the government did not ask for assessment from students. Some universities have students' assessments on a particular course but this was not routine for all courses. There were also no clear rules for staff development and review.

4.4.4 Procedures

The HEEC is the mediator between the MoE and the HEIs to implement the policy. The evaluation panel (*peer review*), with 6 -13 experts, are scholars of various disciplines with high academic reputation or managerial experience. The evaluation procedures include self-evaluation, site visit, lasting for one week, and follow-up reforms. The method consists of a tour of campus, in-class auditing, and interview with teachers and students. The evaluation criteria are fixed by the MoE, containing 8 major indicators and 19 sub-indicators. The criteria for assessment include seven core components: institution mission; faculty; facility and utilisation; academic programs and innovation in teaching; administration of academic affairs; academic culture; and student learning outcomes. After the site-visit, the experts give a formal report to the MoE and grade the performance, based on 'excellent, good, qualified or unqualified.' HEIs must reform according to the team's recommendations (MoE, 2002). Until the end of 2007, 296 HEIs were evaluated, 196 "excellent", 82 "good" and 18 "qualified", 0 "unqualified". According to Liu & Rosa (2008), the quality evaluation policy has significantly improved teaching management and university development planning, but teaching outcomes, such as student learning, have hardly been improved by the new policy.

In England, the basic institutional audit team includes five auditors, one of whom is a students. The auditors will get the train course by QAA directly or in collaboration with appropriate training providers. The purpose of the training will be to ensure that all team members fully understand the aims and objectives of the audit process; that they are acquainted with all the procedures involved; that they understand their own roles and tasks, QAA's expectations of them and the rules of conduct governing the process; and that they have an opportunity to explore and practise the techniques of data assimilation and analysis; the development of programmes for visits; the construction and testing of hypotheses; the conduct of meetings; the forming of judgements and statements of confidence; and the preparation of reports (www.qaa.ac.uk). An institutional briefing and students' briefing will be given to the audit team. A briefing visit will be held five weeks before the audit visit. The audit team will be on site for three days in all, of which two days will involve meetings between the team and key representatives of the institution and its students.

Quality assurance schemes are being developed in higher education systems as one of the necessary instruments to adapt higher education institutions to the increasing demands put upon them (Westerheijden et al, 2007). The drivers for quality assurance may be seen in the context of the regulation of higher education (Westerheijden et al, 2007), and coming from the government with universities passively accepting the supervision. In England, quality assurance is linked to maintaining academic standards while respecting the British tradition of HEIs autonomy. This calls for the active participation of academics. In China, the government imposes a quality assurance policy on educational institutions with the supervision power due to historical and structural reasons. English higher education institutions have a tradition of academic freedom and maintaining academic quality, which means the academic staff has the responsibility for higher education quality.

In contrast, Chinese universities' autonomy is limited and HEIs depend mainly on state policy coordination and guidance. The impact of quality assessment policy for undergraduate programmes is limited. There were some effects of the evaluations: teaching administrators were more positive about the evaluation than academic staff; the effects of the evaluation on teaching and teaching administration were greater than their effect on students' learning; the evaluation's extrinsic effects were stronger than its intrinsic effects on teaching work; and the evaluations' effects on teaching work may gradually weaken as time passes (Gao et al, 2009). The impact of institutional audit for English Universities was significant. Universities adopted a more structured approach to the assurance of high-quality teaching and learning.

4.4.5 Uses

The institutional audit report and other related data are available to the public for the scrutiny of all stakeholders in English Universities. In contrast, quality information on Chinese higher education institutions is not completely open to staff, students and other stakeholders. Only leaders and government inspectors know the quality status of the universities. The information on assessment and quality was primary evidence used by students when choosing schools in England.

In China education and especially higher education have historically been very sensitive domains. The accountability concern and the provision of information were re-confirmed as the central policy beliefs upon which the domain of quality assurance had to be based.

Items			China	England
Objectives			Summative assessment	Formative assessment
Control			HEEC (government)	QAA (government and institutions)
Areas (Focus)			Teaching	Learning
Uses			Institutions	Funding Councils, QAA, institutions, potential consumers, press
Procedure	**Methodology**	**approaches**	outcome	process
		stages	External	External & internal
		methods	Quantitative	Qualitative
	Involvement		Compulsory	Encouraged to be voluntary

Figure 13: Difference in quality assessment policy for undergraduate degree programmes in China and institutional audit policy in England.

4.5 Similarities

4.5.1 Teaching and learning quality improvement

In England the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 abolished the binary system, created national unitary funding councils, removed colleges of further education from local government control, and created quality assessment arrangements (Richards, 1997). The Dearing Report has given the responsibility for maintaining standards and quality in British higher education to the QAA. The Report of the Joint Planning Group listed the objectives of the QAA as: the promotion and maintenance of quality and standards in higher education, the enhancement of teaching and learning with a special responsibility to identify and promote innovation and good practice, to provide information and publish reports on quality and standards in higher education, and to offer, as requested, advice to governments (Joint Planning Group, 1996).

In China, the quality assessment policy for higher education undergraduate degree programmes is a priority in terms of the current Chinese higher education policy. In order to improve the quality of higher education, China has been implementing a number of projects, namely the "Project 211" and the "Project 985". The MoE issued the document "Opinions on further strengthening undergraduate education teaching". The regulation required that universities established the basic awareness that quality was the lifeblood of institutions (MoE, 2005).

4.5.2 Evaluators

In English higher education, the external examiners did not have the necessary expertise to meet the expectations of institutions with regard to monitoring and confirming the relationship between standards and subject benchmark statements (QAA, 2008). There is

often the absence of clear articulation of how to induct and support external examiners' practice. The efficiency and the reliability of external examiners' reports was also a blurred area (QAA, 2005).

The problems for experts in Chinese HE undergraduate degree quality assessment policy lies in three areas: First, two-thirds of the experts are the senior administrators of Chinese universities, of which university presidents or party secretaries were the majority. The number of academic administrative staff is the second largest, and the number of academics among inspecting panels is very limited; Secondly, universities could not get convincing evaluation feedback and recommendations from the evaluation panel because of the experts' limited expertise in the specific subject fields in the universities; And thirdly, the average age of experts was quite high. There is a great need to train younger and professional experts. These problems show the barriers in realising quality assurance and improvement through external assessment.

4.5.3 Accountability and Autonomy

The accountability is an important issue in both countries. In the English system, the regulatory framework has become more elaborated and formalised, and there has been a tendency for new external and mixed forms of quality assurance to be superimposed on existing internal arrangements, in some cases by legislation (Stanley and Patrick, 1998). Externally imposed systems have usually not been well accepted by internal stakeholders and have been more effective for regulation. Generally speaking improvement has been primarily the internal responsibility of individual institutions. Jackson (1997) proposed a shift in the United Kingdom from external accountability review to an emphasis on self-criticism and internal review with appropriate external safeguards.

In China, from 2003 to 2008, all 592 regular higher education institutions underwent

assessment by HEEC. There are many critics about the first round of the assessment, such as the lack of reliable, open and transparent information, which was considered as a barrier to the public's awareness of higher education quality. The practice has shown that direct and unified evaluation posed great challenges and that slight or careless mistakes would thrust the educational department into an undesired spotlight (Li & Qu, 2009).

4.6 Summary

By introducing the development of the China's quality assessment policy of undergraduate programmes and the English institutional audit policy, the differences and similarities are identified with the Perellon's framework. From the aspects of objectives, control, areas, procedures and uses, the differences between the two countries are obvious. Due to the different developing stages, culture and tradition, the differences are understandable. But the policies are convergent as well. In the two countries, the teaching and learning experiences are encouraged, although the evaluators often cannot fully understand the evaluation rules. The accountability systems are established in the two countries.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

By introducing the historical background and development of higher education systems and quality assurance policies in China and UK, the comparative analysis of China's quality assessment policy for undergraduate degree program with UK's institutional audit policy has highlighted the co-existence of differences and similarities across the various aspects of the national policies. Perellon's paradigm framework compares the quality assurance policies in different national contexts from the aspects of objectives, area, control, procedure and uses. In his Ph.D thesis, he concludes that in spite of the divergent national contexts, there is still policy convergence.

In the case of this study, the teaching and learning quality assurance policies in China and UK reflect the different tradition and culture. Differences remain in the aspects of the policy beliefs governing the different national domains and the policy instruments used for translating the beliefs into practice (Perellon, 2001). Concerning the government investment, in China, the great expansion of higher education, that gained a decisive momentum from 1997 onwards, was accompanied by a reduction in financial support. The proportion of GDP destined to higher education is less than 2%. In 2007, the UK invested 0.9% of GDP in tertiary education (http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=410163). In China, politics have always been given first priority. In England, the traditional academic autonomy is still in charge in HEIs. In England, the quality assurance has been an industry already, but in China, the quality assurance is still in its developmental stage.

From the practices of the UK quality assurance policy, there are several points that China could learn from. There should be an independent quality assurance agency in China who can be more neutral between the government and the HEIs. The evaluators should be

trained according to the assessment regulations. As one of the main participants in the HE, students should be selected into the assessment team and have the rights to make decision as well. Concerning the assessment results, the HEIs should have the rights to complain in a certain time. The assessment process should take less academic time and be more cost-effective. The government should establish a consistent and systematic quality assurance policy. Currently China is still in the initial stage of its quality assurance policy; therefore, it is necessary to study from the more experienced countries in order to build a world-class HE in the world.

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